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ABSTRACT

Future trends in enrollment projections are useful to school planners who are involved in making decisions about long-term requirements for school facilities and teachers. The 5- to 17-year-old population is expected to increase by 13 percent over the projection period to 2003. During the projection period, total enrollment is expected in 1996 to surpass the level of 1971 (the previous peak), which is 2 years earlier than the previous projection. Enrollment in kindergarten through grade 8 reached its low in 1984 and has risen since, while enrollment in grades 9 through 12 did not reach a low until 1990. Enrollment in high schools is projected to increase by 22 percent. Trends are likely to differ by region and state. The present projections, the first ones based on 1990 Census figures, are higher than those previously presented. Three tables present enrollment projections and a comparison with past projections. (SLD)

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NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

ISSUE BRIEF

School Enrollment Expected to Surpass Historic All-Time High

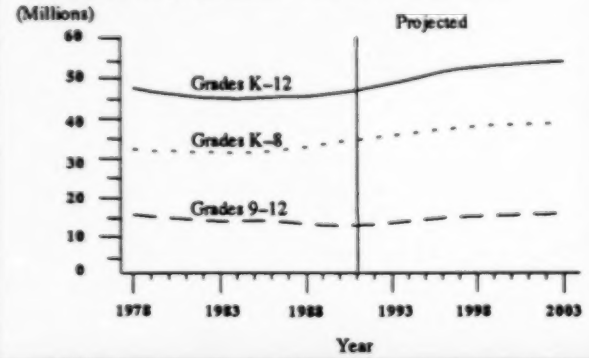
JUNE 1993

Projections are used by policy analysts and researchers in business, industry, government, the media, and education whose work requires a knowledge of projected developments and trends affecting American education. In particular, future trends in enrollment projections are useful to school planners who are involved in making decisions about long-term requirements for school facilities and teachers.

What will be the future trend in elementary and secondary school enrollment?

Influenced primarily by the rising number of annual births since 1977 (sometimes referred to as the baby-boom echo), the 5- to 17-year-old population is projected to increase by 13 percent over the projection period[1] (table 1). As a result, there will also be a period of rising enrollment in public and private elementary and secondary schools. Total elementary and secondary enrollment is projected to increase by 13 percent from 1992 to 2003 (figure 1 and table 2).

Figure 1.—Enrollment in elementary and secondary schools, with projections: Fall 1978 to fall 2003



When will the enrollment level surpass the historic all-time high?

During the projection period, total enrollment will surpass the level in 1971, when enrollment peaked at 51.3 million. In *Projections of Education Statistics to 2003*, this is projected to occur in 1996, when enrollment will be 51.6 million. This is 2 years earlier than the timing of this event reported in the 1991 edition of *Projections of Education Statistics to 2002*, when it was projected to be in 1998. See second page for an account of why the projections have changed.

Table 1.—Percent changes from 1978 to 1992 and 1992 to 2003

Variable	1978 to 1992	1992 to 2003
5- to 17-year-old population	–4.8	12.6
Enrollment in grades K–12	0.5	13.3
Enrollment in grades K–8	8.8	9.9
Enrollment in grades 9–12	–16.9	22.4

Table 2.—Enrollment in elementary and secondary schools, by grade level: 1978, 1992, and 2003

(In millions)

Grade Level	1978	1992	2003
Grades K–12	47.6	47.9	54.2
Grades K–8	32.2	35.0	38.5
Grades 9–12	15.4	12.8	15.7

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How will enrollment differ by grade level?

Recently, trends in enrollments in grades K–8 and grades 9–12 have differed greatly. Enrollment in grades K–8 reached a low in 1984 and increased steadily to the present (figure 1). On the other hand, enrollment in grades 9–12 did not reach a low until 1990. The future trends will be alike with enrollments in grades K–8 and grades 9–12 rising significantly. Enrollment in grades 9–12 is projected to rise by 22 percent, while enrollment in grades K–8 is expected to increase by 10 percent (table 1).

Will enrollment trends differ by region and state?

Most likely, enrollment trends will differ by region and state. The Census projections used to produce the enrollment projections presented in this report are national projections. Population projections at the state level will be developed by the Census Bureau in the near future, and enrollment projections by state, to be prepared by NCES, will follow thereafter. State and local government planners may wish to consult the forthcoming *State Projections of Education Statistics*, as well as their state forecasters.

How different are these enrollment projections from past enrollment projections?

The 1992 edition of *Projections of Education Statistics to 2003* is the first report to present enrollment projections based on the 1990 census. When these enrollment projections are compared to previous enrollment projections published in the 1990 edition of *Projections of Education Statistics to 2001: An Update* and the 1991 edition of *Projections of Education Statistics to 2002*, differences emerge. Enrollment projections shown in the 1990 and 1991 editions were based on two alternative sets of population projections derived from the 1980 census.

[1]The population projections used to develop the enrollment projections are consistent with the Census Bureau middle series, which assumes an ultimate complete cohort fertility rate of 2.1 births per woman by the year 2050, a net immigration of 880,000 per year, and a further reduction of the mortality rate. The enrollment projections were determined using a technique called the grade retention rate method. A greater explanation of the data and the projection techniques used to produce these projections can be found in the publication *Projections of Education Statistics to 2003*.

Table 3.—Comparison of selected assumptions from three editions of *Projections of Education Statistics* and K–12 enrollment in the year 2001

	1992 edition	1991 edition	1990 edition
Ultimate complete cohort fertility rate per woman by the year 2050	2.1	2.2	1.8
Net immigration per year	880,000	800,000	500,000
K–12 enrollment in 2001 (millions)	53.8	52.6	49.8

Source: Bureau of the Census and National Center for Education Statistics.

Changes in assumptions for the future fertility rate (i.e., births per woman) and net immigration account for the differences among the three sets of enrollment projections. The alternative assumptions for the fertility rate and net immigration can be found in table 3.

The enrollment projections presented in the 1992 edition are higher than those in earlier editions. (See table 3 for a comparison of the enrollment projections for 2001.) For the year 2001, the 1992 edition enrollment projection is 8.1 percent larger than the projection in the 1990 edition and 2.1 percent larger than the projection in the 1991 edition.

For more information, see the following reports:

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Projections of Education Statistics to 2003* (NCES 92–218), by D.E. Gerald and W.J. Hussar, Washington D.C.: 1992.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Pocket Projections: 1980–81 to 2002–2003* (NCES 93–194), by W.J. Hussar, Washington D.C.: 1993.

SOURCE: All data in this *Issue Brief* are from *Projections of Education Statistics to 2003*. National Center for Education Statistics, NCES 92–218.

Issue Briefs present information on education topics of current interest. For methodological details on the assumptions and methods used to produce the projections presented in this *Issue Brief*, see *Projections of Education Statistics to 2003*.

This *Issue Brief* was prepared by Debra E. Gerald and William J. Hussar. For further information on education projections, contact Debra E. Gerald, (202) 219–1581, and William J. Hussar, (202) 219–1682. To receive a copy of this *Issue Brief*, call 1–800–424–1616.